

WYCOMBE Wanderers' proposal to upgrade the status of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup, by making it a midweek floodlit competition including Fourth Division Reading, seems certain to fail — despite the near-unanimous support of clubs which do have floodlights, writes ALAN CAMPBELL.

Although the full Berks and Bucks FA Council agreed to refer the issue to their Cup Competitions Committee when they met in London on Tuesday, the general opinion among senior clubs in the two counties is that the Association will eventually reject the Wycombe proposal.

But the darkest news for those in favour of a floodlit competition is that Reading do not intend to enter.

Secretary Roy Bentley told the Free Press this week that Reading could not undertake any further fixture commitments.

The former England player and Reading manager said: "We have received a copy of the Wycombe document, but, while we are always interested in new competitions, I have talked the proposal over with manager Maurice Evans and he is reluctant to take on more games."

GOOD IDEA

"It is a good idea to give the competition added interest, but there is no way that Mr Evans is going to commit his first team players to extra pressures."

Commenting on Wycombe's reference in their discussion document to Nottingham Forest's participation in the corresponding Notts County Senior Cup, Mr Bentley said:

"Forest have their policy and we have ours. It's worth pointing out, however, that they have a big playing staff while we only have 17 professionals at Reading."

Without the involvement of the only Football League club in the two counties, Wycombe's proposal loses most of its lustre. Unfortunately it has probably also created a rift between the senior clubs with floodlights, and those without.

Arguing that floodlights have been available for 25 years, the Wycombe document suggests that any club with ambition would have had them installed by now. They therefore proposed that the 16 Senior Cup clubs without floodlights should play a preliminary competition — with the top two joining the 13 clubs with floodlights, plus Reading, in the cup proper. As a further penalty, the two non-lit clubs would have to play all their ties away from home.

ILL-FEELING

A Free Press survey this week exposed the potential ill feeling caused by such an arrangement.

Leading the support for the floodlit proposal are Slough. Their secretary, Roger Lee, said: "It is a good idea in principle but I doubt if it's feasible."

Mr Lee said he was in favour of upgrading the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup, but added, "It is very difficult to make a silk purse from a sow's ear."

The Slough secretary made it clear that he has no sympathy for clubs without floodlights. Indeed, Slough will be trying to salvage something from the Wycombe proposal by having the Senior Cup rules amended to make replays compulsory under floodlights if that is the wish of the home club.

Mr Lee said the present position whereby clubs could decline to take part in a replay under floodlights was ludicrous. "Senior clubs ought to behave in a senior manner," he said.

Reaction from other clubs, with floodlights was more muted, but nevertheless favourable to the Wycombe proposal.

Maidenhead secretary Sam Harwood said his club would be supporting Wycombe's move, but couldn't see it happening because Reading weren't interested.

FORKED TONGUE

Amersham Town, who only had their floodlights installed four months ago, are also in favour. Manager Richard Jerome said: "We speak like man with forked tongue because six months ago we would have been against Wycombe Wanderers' proposal."

"But," he added, "while I appreciate the position of clubs who haven't got floodlights, you have to be ambitious in football and try to improve standards all the time."

Wokingham Town press secretary Dave Wright said he was "very keen" on the idea of a midweek floodlit competition. "Even this season we have tried to play midweek because of Isthmian League fixtures," he explained.

The only club with floodlights we contacted which opposed the Wycombe proposal was Chesham.

Secretary David Barnes said: "We favour playing on Saturday because we can get a better gate. I don't think the proposal will go through, and in any case I don't really see why clubs without lights should be penalised."

Naturally, Wycombe's discussion document has provoked great resentment among the 16

Berks and Bucks Senior Cup clubs without floodlights. In a letter to the Free Press last week, Burnham's programme secretary Brian Hookey attacked Wycombe Wanderers for having the "affrontery" to suggest any changes in the Senior Cup.

He recalled an incident at the end of a Senior Cup Final when the Wanderers players refused to accept their medals and the cup — "leaving the lads of Thatcham Town humiliated, embarrassed, and very upset." Mr Hookey went on to say that Wanderers had no right to talk about making the Senior Cup more prestigious after they themselves had demeaned it.

The Burnham secretary, Mike Boxall, said that his club had not officially discussed Wycombe's proposal. Apparently Wanderers failed to send their document to any of the clubs without floodlights.

"The first we heard of this new proposal was when we read about it in your newspaper," he said. Mr Boxall added that obviously his club would be very much against the proposal.

"The new arrangement would virtually eliminate clubs like us, who, after all, can be considered outside contenders for the trophy."

Mr Boxall said it was important to remember that some clubs, like Burnham, had the resources and ambition to erect floodlights, but were presently unable to do so because of planning regulations.



NEIL BARBER
... sacked

BARBER SACKED

BURNHAM have sacked goalkeeper Neil Barber after he refused to play in the reserves on Saturday.

Barber who signed from Marlow at the beginning of the season was a first team regular up to Saturday. He lost his place to Junger, who has performed well in the reserves, after some erratic performances.

The young goalkeeper refused to play for the reserves in their Middlesex Border League game with Kingsbury Town and was seen at the Gore watching the first team beat Uxbridge 2-1.

Manager Malcolm Highton said he was disappointed to see Barber go, but added: "We have to have some sort of discipline. I don't stand a refusal to play from anybody."

Long but rewarding

IT proved a very long but rewarding day for the faithful 200 or so loyal fans who followed Wycombe Wanderers up to Blyth on Saturday.

The crucial matter of course, was that Blues played well to earn a draw. But even if they had lost, the fans would still have enjoyed the trip, so well were they looked after by the Wycombe Supporters Club.

Not only did they organise the train but provided hot beverages during the 12 hours round trip by rail. So that it did not matter too much that the train's heating system was well below standard.

The coach journey from Morpeth to Blyth was something like a military operation. Fearing

Blyth's reputation for troublesome hooligans, the local police turned out in force.

The five coaches went the 10 mile journey in convoy surrounded by police, motor-cyclists, who halted all other traffic. The Wycombe fans revelled in the fact that they were being treated like royalty — or was it more like a load of prisoners!

FRIENDLY

Most of the locals were friendly and helpful, even when things went wrong. For instance the host club ran out of match programmes long before the kick off.

The police and coach drivers seemed to have a friendly word for everybody and the only unfriendly act was one Blyth youngsters who threw a stone at one of the coach

windows but even that refused to break.

The Wycombe players appreciated the support they received. Not only did they wave to the fans when they went on to the field, but they eased the boredom of the long journey back by train, by chatting with the supporters.

Credit for the enjoyable day which ended at nearly 1 a.m. on Sunday, must go to Ron Butterfield and his hard working helpers from the Supporters Club.

Their work was much appreciated by all the fans I talked to — and it wasn't their fault that the train was cold.

All those who bought tickets but did not go, can have their money refunded minus a small administration charge at the ground tomorrow.

Here's to the next time!

M.K.